



28th District

## News & Views

from your  
State Representative

Mike Carrell



Dear friends,

The 1997 legislative session is now over, and I hope you will agree that it was a great session. The Legislature did your business in almost record time. We finished and got out of Olympia on time for the first time in 40 years! We wrote a budget that is not only below the Initiative 601 limit but also cuts taxes \$411 million. We made sure we have almost \$400 million in reserve while funding the education needs of our schools.

I feel very privileged to have served you again as your representative and to have had a chance to work on major bills before the Legislature. Many big problems that have been ignored for years by the Legislature were finally addressed this session. While much work needs to be done over the next several years, look at what we accomplished in 105 days!

- Welfare reform
- Juvenile justice reform
- Property tax reform and other tax reductions
- Local issues: trauma care funding, Western State Hospital pre-release prison removal

While much was accomplished, much work remains for me next year in the Legislature, including two bills I wrote which died in the Senate that would make our neighborhoods and our children safer from gangs.

This legislative session was also known for major legislation that died because citizens like you opposed them. Two notable examples were the gas tax and driver's license fingerprinting bills. I opposed both bills, although for different reasons. Later in this legislative wrap up newsletter, I will discuss all of these bills at greater length.

Finally, I need your suggestions for future legislation about crime, taxes or other problems of state government. I would also like to know how I can better serve you. Please take a minute to fill out the enclosed card with your ideas, and if you would like a phone call, include your number.

## Welfare Reform

This session, after five years of trying, we were successful in changing the welfare system to reflect your values. Work and personal responsibility are the centerpieces of our new welfare law.

For the first time in the 60-year-old history of welfare, recipients of public assistance will now be required to work or seek work in order to qualify. Welfare will no longer be an entitlement. Recipients will be required to take personal responsibility for their own welfare because benefits for most people are now limited to five years. The previous system had no work requirement and no time limit.

Besides receiving a cash grant, those who work or look for work will also be eligible for increased child-care assistance. Those who cannot find work will be assessed to determine what skills they lack to begin working. Then the state will provide job training, job-search assistance or other support to help them become employed. As they move up the economic ladder to self-sufficiency, they will continue receiving the cash grants, child care and other benefits and incentives until they are on their feet.

This is historic change for Washington state, a change you have demanded for a long time. I am pleased to have served on the Children and Family Services Committee where this bill originated and to have had a role in reforming welfare.



## Representative Mike Carrell • 28th District

### Juvenile Justice Reform Passes

In 1977, the Legislature created a system of laws dealing with children that time has shown did not work. The Becca Laws of 1995 that I sponsored and subsequent changes have returned some sanity to the noncriminal laws dealing with children. This year, the Legislature finally passed and the governor signed common-sense changes to our juvenile criminal laws. This completes the rejection of the 1977 laws.

Now, 16- and 17-year-old criminals who commit adult crimes like murder, rape of a child, or any crime with a gun, will be treated as adults. Their records will not be wiped clean at 18 if they continue to pursue criminal activity. These crimes will also count as "strikes" for the Three Strikes and You're Out law.

Sentences have been increased and prosecutors and judges will have the tools to make certain that every juvenile who breaks the law will face consequences for their actions. No longer can a teen-age criminal steal your car without being punished. Beginning with the first offense, a juvenile criminal will know that he faces punishment if he is caught.

### Tax Reductions

Because Republicans believe state government has become too big and expensive, we enacted more than three dozen tax reductions this session saving taxpayers \$411 million in the next two years. We figure the best way to reduce government is to put it on a financial diet.

The biggest tax reductions were property tax cuts. As vice chair of the House Finance Committee, I began working to reduce property taxes more than a year ago because I learned they have been increasing at double or triple the rate of inflation and population growth for many years. On average, they've doubled over the last 8.4 years. Pierce County's collections increased 10 percent between 1995 and 1996.

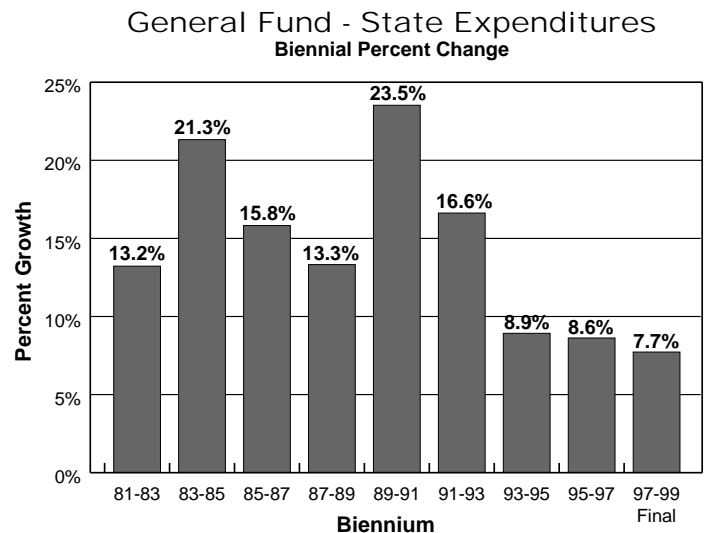
I proposed limiting future tax increases to the rate of inflation. The Legislature approved the bill but the governor vetoed it. So we passed it again, this time with a referendum clause that will give you a chance in November to approve the idea. If approved, the inflation limitation and another of our property tax cuts the governor did sign would save the owner of a \$110,000 home about \$23,000 over the 30-year life of the mortgage.

Unfortunately, Steilacoom and Fircrest residents may not feel the tax relief if it is approved in November because of a technical exemption supported by your state senator. It would exempt those cities from the restrictions on future property tax increases.

Nevertheless, this session has been amazing. We rolled back business and occupation taxes to pre-1993 levels, and reduced many others. Tax increases, once a routine in Olympia, were not on the table this session.

### State Budget

Along with sizeable tax reductions, we approved a taxpayers' two-year state budget that contains the smallest spending increase in 25 years.



The \$19 billion 1997-1999 general fund budget increases 7.7 percent to account for inflation and population growth, but holds spending \$112 million under the Initiative 601 spending limit. While strongly opposed by Democrats who generally want to spend as much as possible, this conservative budget will lock in future savings for taxpayers as well as secure immediate savings. Because next biennium's I-601 spending limit is based on this biennium's actual spending, the next spending limit will be lower than it could have been had we spent to the maximum in 1997-1999, and so will the one after that. Over the next six years, the \$112 million will mushroom into \$804 million — saved by taxpayers because our goal was to spend less of your tax money than we legally could.

We cut more than \$250 million in state programs and used the money to help fund \$288 million in K-12 education program enhancements — things like computer/technology purchases, textbooks, reading initiatives, and several grants. We also funded higher college enrollments, eliminated a deficit in the account funding the Basic Health Plan, supplemented the school construction and transportation funds, funded more DSHS case workers, and made many other common-sense, business-like decisions. All the while reducing the number of state employees and cutting the overall spending per state citizen.



## Education

In addition to passing an “education budget,” we passed a remarkable package of about 25 education policy laws we called the ADCs of Education, standing for Academics, Discipline, Community Involvement and Choice. Our core belief is that the Legislature needs to take the lead in establishing higher K-12 standards for basic academics: reading, writing, math, science and history.

Included in our legislation are measures to improve basic reading skills of primary grade students; give teachers, administrators and communities more say in how to run their schools; provide the schools with more ability to have safe and disciplined classrooms; and return to parents the authority to make certain decisions about their child’s education.

## Pierce County Medical Trauma Care

Trauma care returns to Pierce County next year for the first time since 1995. Senate Bill 5127 passed the Legislature and has become law because of changes that I made to the bill’s funding that assured House passage. The bill as originally written by the Senate funded trauma care by a new \$15 tax on people who buy cars. There is little connection between this proposed tax and the cause of trauma. I felt that the bill would not pass the House as written, so I changed the funding source to speeding tickets and driving violations and the House agreed with my changes with a 97-0 vote.

The trauma care bill was filled with problems that had to be corrected to get the bill passed. I believe that you want us to get the job done in Olympia, but without wasting tax dollars. The original Senate bill not only overstated the costs of unfunded trauma care in the state but also did not attempt to cut costs by getting available federal matching money. My amendments to this bill fixed both of those problems.

In addition, all other areas of the state already have trauma care without state help. The House was skeptical of the need to create a large state funding source for what was perceived as a Pierce County problem, so I had to reduce the cost as much as possible to make it acceptable to other parts of the state.

During negotiations, two senators reluctantly agreed to reduce their tax on car registrations from \$15 to \$6.50 if I lowered my traffic ticket surcharge to \$5. This compromise created the lowest cost package possible and saved taxpayers millions each year they would have paid with the original bill. Even so, it was a tough fight to get the

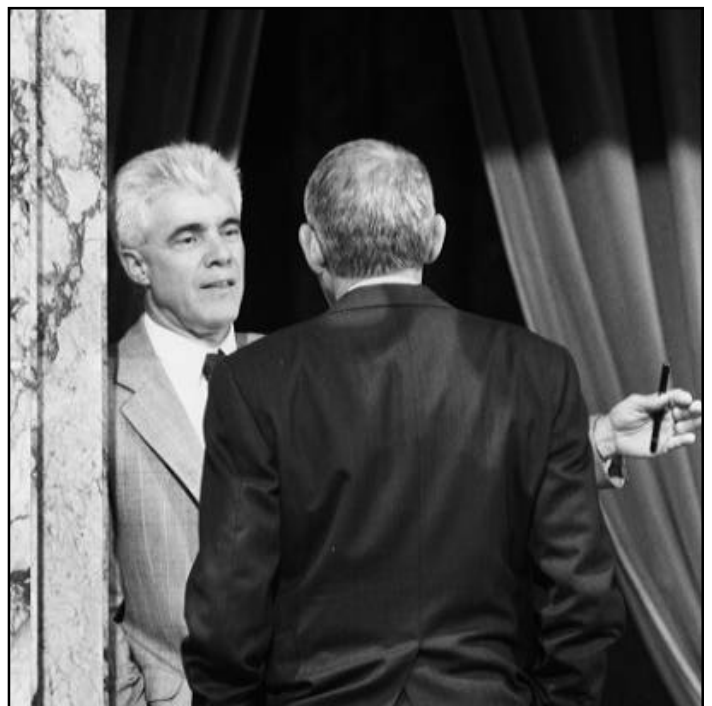
compromise bill passed by the House the last day of the session. I am pleased that the governor signed the bill thereby assuring increased safety for our citizens who need trauma care.

## Ft. Steilacoom Park

I am pleased that local citizens, my seatmate, Rep. Gigi Talcott, and I forced a favorable resolution to the old question of who owns/controls Ft. Steilacoom Park. The park’s future was in doubt last year when two local senators proposed using its land for apartments. Local citizens became outraged, so Gigi and I helped organize their opposition to the plan. Recently, the county, state and city of Lakewood came to a preliminary agreement that preserves the land as a park for the next 100 years. I am very pleased about the agreement and believe it would not have happened without my work with Gigi and local park supporters.

## Western State Hospital Pre-release Facility

Again, local citizens, Gigi and I worked well together to oppose expansion of the criminal pre-release facility on the grounds of Western State Hospital. In a big win for the safety of Lakewood residents, the Legislature provided



*Mike discusses legislation with Speaker of the House Clyde Ballard.*

funds to build the prison facility on Tacoma's tideflats instead of in our back yards. The new facility will generate revenue for the Puyallup Indian Tribe and additional tax revenue for Tacoma.

## New Challenges

- Street gangs bills

In response to our area's criminal gang problems, I wrote and prime sponsored two bills that would have made our community safer from gangs. One would have increased prison sentences for crimes connected with gang activity, and the other would have made it possible for landlords and neighborhoods to evict tenants involved in gang activities. These bills passed the House 91-3 and 95-2 respectively and passed the Senate Law and Justice Committee only to die in the Senate. I will

reintroduce this legislation next session to stop street gangs (HB 1522) and gang involved families (HB 1223).

- School boundary disputes

The on-going dispute between the Steilacoom and Clover Park School districts and a similar dispute between the University Place and Tacoma School districts have made it abundantly clear that the present laws for resolving school boundary issues need to be completely revised. Some of these laws are as old as 1908. Cities may contain multiple school districts, and many school districts include more than one city.

While no resolution to these disputes came from this Legislature, I believe that next year's Legislature will completely rewrite the resolution process. I will be participating in these discussions, and I have written a bill that could be the basis for these changes. It includes a fair appeal process which is missing from the present law.

## Invitation to 28th District residents: TOWN HALL MEETING



► Thursday, June 19  
7 p.m. - 9 p.m.

Clover Park Technical College  
Conference room 31

*You are invited to attend my Town Hall Meeting with Rep. Gigi Talcott. Please come to this informal, free discussion of state government issues.*

## ActionGram

Please send me your ideas for future legisltion or tell me how I can better serve you. Complete the space below, clip and mail to me. I look forward to hearing from you.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Address \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_